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Shankar Foundation Eye Hospital provides medical services to Saura Tribal mission

ANDHRA PRADESH, India - Shanthinagar, in the state of Andhra Pradesh in Indian vice-province, is a mission a là Monfort.

It was in 1989 on July 3rd when we took up the Saura Tribal mission in the remote areas of the then Visakhapatnam Diocese, now it is in the Diocese of Srikakulam. The mission area is about 220 kms from Visakhapatnam and 100 kms from Srikakulam town. It is situated at the borders of Orissa state and is mostly populated by the Saura tribals. These tribals have their own unique culture, language, traditions and way of life. They live mostly in the hills and mountains. Once in a while they come down to the plains and to small towns to purchase necessary home items /needs and provisions, and to sell the produce they cultivate in the hills. Generally, these tribals are poor. They live in the agency areas of Andhra state, that is an area of the state, set apart for the

development and upliftment of the Tribal population of the area with special privileges, amenities/provisions from the Central Government. In these thirty-six years of our presence here in this area, has made a considerable difference in the quality of life, Catholic faith, education and transport system and over all development for the people. Now some of the tribal youths are employed as government employees, mainly as teachers in the schools.

One of the basic needs of these people is the medical facilities and requirements. They have no access to good doctors or hospitals. Some of them even die, because they lack immediate medical care. The government has set up clinics here and there in the agency area; but they seldom function with efficiency. If there is a doctor, there is no medicine or it is closed for many days. Therefore, people do not get proper medical treatment on time. Because of these inconveniences for the people, sometimes medical camps are organized through our initiatives and with the help of some non-governmental agencies to help these poor tribals, so that they have better help check-ups periodically.

One of such medical camps was organized in the Shanthinagar Parish for the poor tribals of the mission in premises of the parish specifically for the eye check-up. It was made possible with the generous of help of Mr. Swaminadhan, the all-India Catholic association council member, the doctors, nurses and volunteers from Shankar Foundation Eye Hospital who had come from Vishakhapatnam with all the medical facilities to meet the needs of the people. People began to come for the treatment by 10 am and the doctors and other supporting staff had already reached by then. There were around 300 plus people who had come for the treatment. Most of them had their eyes tested and some of them were given spectacles to wear. The agency had even come with a bus to take the people to the hospital in case they needed eye operation. Around 43 people were taken for the operation on the same day and another 24 were taken two days later with free pick up and drop to their destinations. The medical camp came to an end by 3.30 pm and the medical personnel left the place to their destination. I express my sincere gratitude to my community members Fr. Dias and Fr. Santhosh for their unconditional support.

We pray that God may open the eyes and hearts of such generous persons and organisations to come out to help these poor people. We are grateful to God Alone for His Providence and to Mary our Mother for her grace-filled assistance and prayers. TOTUS TUUS.

Fr. Aswani KUMAR SMM